



OPPORTUNITIES



OVER 90 GIRLS AND WOMEN GRADUATED WITH DIFFERENT SKILLS LAST WEEK

BY ALOYSIOUS KASOMA

Umama Arise Uganda, a non-government organisation, equips women and girls with marketable skills in entrepreneurship to create employment opportunities for youth and women.

According to Stephen Magezi, a Ugandan community development advocate who spent years travelling through rural villages, Umama Arise Uganda, which started a decade ago, started from a simple, yet urgent observation — women and youth in rural Uganda possessed immense ambition, but lacked the skills and opportunities to turn it into sustainable livelihoods.

"Today, that vision has grown into one of the most inspiring grassroots skilling and job-creation movements, transforming families across Mukono and neighbouring districts," he explained after the graduation of over 90 girls and women, with different hands skills last week.

Umama Arise Uganda was co-founded by Jessica Krell Saffer, an economist from the University of Florida and Magezi.

Magezi says Saffer first visited Uganda in 2010 and 2011 to teach leadership workshops and was moved by the determination of mothers striving to provide for their families, despite overwhelming odds.

He, on the other hand, saw how every major social challenge — childhood illness, school dropouts, poor maternal health, teenage pregnancy and chronic poverty — was linked to the economic well-being of mothers.

"Whenever I entered a village, I could see the story immediately: If the mother was struggling, the children were struggling. Empowering a mother transforms an entire household. That is why we built an organisation centred on the economic strength of women," Magezi said.

Armed with his background in business administration, experience with AGOA markets and years of youth mentorship, Magezi joined Saffer to build an initiative aimed not at giving handouts, but at cultivating lasting skills, confidence and economic independence.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN

UMAMA ARISE UGANDA SKILLS HUNDREDS OF WOMEN, GIRLS TO CREATE JOBS



PHOTO BY ALOYSIOUS KASOMA

Some of the graduands from Umama Arise Uganda celebrate during their graduation ceremony, which took place at the Umama Community Centre on Friday, last week

SKILLING THAT LEADS TO JOBS

Unlike many training centres, Umama Arise Uganda designs its programmes by first listening to communities, studying market demand and analysing which courses lead to real income.

Skills, such as tailoring, hairdressing, beauty therapy, basic electrical and plumbing support, digital literacy and entrepreneurship are selected based on actual opportunities in local shops, households and small businesses.

The organisation is also an accredited assessment centre under Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB), meaning every graduate leaves with a nationally recognised certificate that strengthens their employment prospects.

Through partnerships with businesses, VSLAs, community projects and private companies like Coca-Cola, SOGEA SATOM/VINCI, Barefoot Law, and Mukono District Local Government, trainees receive hands-on experience and meaningful exposure to real work environments.

BENEFICIARIES SPEAK

When Bakita Felister joined Umama Arise Uganda, she was a mother determined to uplift her household, but had limited means.

"I just wanted something small to support my children. The training made me believe I could do more," she said.

After completing her course and saving through the Umama-supported Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), Bakita secured a small loan and opened Daproz Salon in Ntawo village in Mukono. What began as a modest one-room business has grown into a vibrant, fully equipped salon that now doubles as a training hub.

Bakita personally trains 20 girls every cycle, equipping them with hairdressing and beauty skills that give them a pathway to employment and independence.

Her steady income allows her to support her three children's education and her leadership was recognised when she was elected VSLA chairperson — a role she says has strengthened her confidence and ability to mentor others.

"Umama Arise didn't just teach me hairdressing, it taught me to believe in myself and to lift other women with me," Bakita reflected.

Joy Nansubuga, another beneficiary, progressed from trainee to business owner and trainer. Nansubuga joined Umama Arise Uganda with a simple dream: Self-reliance. But she had no tools and no capital. "The first time I touched a sewing machine, I knew this was my future," she said.

After training, Nansubuga secured a loan and purchased two sewing machines. Years later, she now owns 10 sewing machines, employs other young women and runs a successful tailoring workshop.

Nansubuga's workshop is also an extension training centre, where she trains 15 girls every six months.

"Umama transformed me and now I want to transform many others," she said.

TURNING SKILLS INTO INCOME AND BREAKING POVERTY CYCLES

Magezi noted that job creation is at the very heart of the organisation's

mission.

"Our work is not complete, until a mother can feed her children, keep them in school and stand proudly on her own two feet. Skilling is only the beginning — economic transformation is the goal," he said.

Through practical vocational and entrepreneurial programmes, women not only increase their earnings, but also invest in their children's education, access healthcare more consistently, improve family nutrition, reduce financial vulnerability and take on leadership roles within VSLAs and community groups.

Magezi highlighted that many of the workshops run by graduates, such as those of Bakita and Nansubuga, have evolved into community skills hubs, multiplying the impact of training across entire villages.

Recognising the growing demand for practical skills, Umama Arise is expanding into additional local governments, including Buikwe, Kayunga, Jinja, Namayingo, Kasawo and Nakifuma.

"We are building a movement of skilled, confident, economically independent women, and we are just getting started," Magezi explained.

The organisation's upcoming initiatives include establishing new skills hubs in deep rural communities, extending training workshops, expanding VSLA networks and creating programmes specifically for out-of-school girls and teenage mothers.

Digital literacy and small business clinics are also planned, ensuring participants gain the skills necessary to thrive in today's evolving economy.

Opportunities to join these programmes are accessible to any woman or young person through local leaders, churches, VSLA groups, community outreach events or direct walk-ins at training centres.

No academic qualifications are required, only interest and commitment.